



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bureau of Land Management
National Park Service
Bureau of Indian Affairs

Federal Subsistence Management Program

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Sustenance and Science on the Kuskokwim

Once again this summer, fishery technicians working for the Bethel-based Orutsararmiut Native Council will be contacting approximately 50 Kuskokwim River subsistence fish camps between Oscarville and the mouth of the Kwethluk River. By telephone, two-way radio and in-person visits, they will gather information each week on the subsistence harvest of salmon.

These harvest surveys have been conducted since 2001 with funding from the federal Office of Subsistence Management. Biologists with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game provide technical support for those who conduct the survey. This harvest data, together with data gathered from test fishing projects and escapement counting weirs, provide important information on the timing of runs and relative abundance of salmon. All of this information assists fishery managers when they make decisions to ensure that enough salmon make it upriver to spawn; to provide the opportunity for subsistence harvest of fish; and to provide the opportunity for commercial and sport fisheries when enough salmon are available.

Both state and federal fisheries managers have come to depend on these in-season surveys, said Robert Sundown, a subsistence biologist with the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge. "When June 20th arrives and the Kuskokwim River Fisheries Management Working Group and fishery managers must decide if we need to continue the subsistence fishing schedule, the in-season catch monitoring information is critical for figuring out what to do," Sundown said.

Greg Roczicka, the resource director for Orutsararmiut Native Council, supervises the subsistence harvest survey team. Roczicka says the longtime fishing families that provide harvest information have a valuable perspective to offer. "Fisheries managers have a limited perspective on the salmon runs, while the collective knowledge of nearly 50 experienced subsistence fishing families who have fished these waters for generations easily equates to more than 1,000 years of practical experience and observation," Roczicka said.

The lower Kuskokwim River harvest survey is just one example of direct involvement by an Alaska Native organization in the collection of primary fisheries data. The Office of Subsistence Management has made a commitment to involve rural and Alaska Native organizations in the projects it funds. The harvest survey is one of 13 fisheries monitoring and research studies funded by the Federal Subsistence Management Program on the Kuskokwim.

For additional information on these and other projects, contact Richard Cannon at (800) 478-1456 or (907) 786-3397 or by e-mail Richard_Cannon@fws.gov. Additional information on the Federal subsistence program can be found on the web at <http://alaska.fws.gov/asm/home.html>.